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Press Release

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W E D N E S D A Y H I G H L I G H T S

- + Union of Arab Maghreb -- Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia -- requests urgent Security Council meeting to examine "grave situation in Gulf region".
- + Secretary-General is informed by Iraqi Ambassador that 40 civilians have been killed and 180 wounded during first week of air strikes in Iraq.
- + United States calls on Iraq to respect international laws on armed conflict, including Geneva Conventions on protection of victims of war, The Hague Conventions on conduct of hostilities on land and at sea, and 1925 Geneva Protocol prohibiting use of chemical or biological weapons.
- + Human Rights Commission Special Rapporteur in Geneva appeals for respect for civilian life in Gulf conflict.
- + Thirteen countries announce pledges to Cambodian Humanitarian Assistance Programmes to support \$58.2 million budget of United Nations Border Relief Operation (UNBRO) for 1991.

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The five North African States of the Union of Arab Maghreb (Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia) have requested an urgent meeting of the Security Council "to examine the grave situation in the Gulf region".

The request was made today in a letter addressed to the President of the Council, Bagbeni Adeito Nzengeya (Zaire).

The Council has not met in formal session on this subject since the beginning of the hostilities in the Gulf.

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The United Nations has been informed by the Permanent Representative of Iraq, Abdul Amir Al-Anbari, that a total of 40 civilians have been killed and 180 wounded in Iraq during the first week of air strikes. The letter, dated

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22 January, also reported of the killing of one person and the wounding of 11 others in Kuwait.

The Iraqi Ambassador said the air bombardment and missiles launched by the United States and its "so-called allies" against urban centres in Iraq had resulted in civilian casualties and damage to a large number of Iraqi cities and urban centres. The letter listed 10 Iraqi provinces said to have suffered damage.

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The Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations, Thomas R. Pickering, has called upon the Government of Iraq to respect its obligations under the international laws of armed conflict, including the Geneva Conventions on protection of victims of war, The Hague Conventions on the conduct of hostilities on land and at sea, and the 1925 Geneva Protocol not to use chemical or biological weapons.

In a letter, dated 21 January, addressed to the President of the Security Council in which the United States protested Iraq's announced intention to hold prisoners of war as hostage or to use them as human shields, Mr. Pickering said Iraqi prisoners of war would not be mistreated by the United States and would be provided humane and safe detention and medical care.

Ambassador Pickering said his country expected Iraq to provide the same treatment to members of the United States and other coalition armed forces captured by Iraq, in accordance with Iraq's obligations under the Geneva Conventions. Mr. Pickering reminded the Government of Iraq that under international law, violations of the Geneva Conventions, the Geneva Protocol of 1925 or related international laws of armed conflict are war crimes and that individuals guilty of such violations may be subject to prosecution at any time, without any statute of limitations. This included members of the Iraqi armed forces and civilian government officials.

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The Commission on Human Rights Special Rapporteur on summary or arbitrary executions, S. Amos Wako, made an appeal in Geneva yesterday for the respect for civilian life in connection with the hostilities in the Gulf.

Mr. Wako stated that his mandate reflected the importance attached by the international community to the protection of the most fundamental of all human rights -- the right to life. It was in situations of armed conflict and hostilities such as the one now existing in the Gulf region that even greater care must be taken to ensure that the violation of the right to life was minimized, the Special Rapporteur said. He therefore strongly appealed to all the parties to adhere to the letter and spirit of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the 1977 Protocols.

He urged the parties to ensure in their military strategies and policies that the right to life of the civilian population and those persons not taking part in the hostilities was respected. The right to life of the prisoners of

war should not be violated or endangered, he said, and they should not be exposed to danger or violence or intimidation. Further, the right to life of the wounded and the sick should be protected by giving proper medical care and attention.

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Thirteen countries have announced pledges to support the \$58.2 million budget for international humanitarian assistance programmes for Cambodian refugees for 1991.

Among the agencies supporting such assistance are the United Nations Border Relief Operation (UNBRO), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO). At a meeting yesterday at Headquarters, donors heard an appraisal of the situation by representatives of those agencies.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General, S.A.M.S. Kibria, said that for the first time in the history of the border relief operation, UNBRO did not have sufficient pledges to cover basic food needs. Efforts were being offset by the large number of internally displaced persons, which numbered more than 130,000.

The Director of UNBRO, Alan Doss, said in that recent weeks there had been a huge influx of new arrivals in the camps. The operation was concerned about the presence of armed elements in the camps and the traffic in weapons and ammunition. An upsurge in banditry in the areas surrounding the camps had also caused many security problems.

The representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Fred Isler, expressed concern over how the repatriation of the 300,000 refugees on the Thai-Cambodia border would actually take place. He said all three resistance factions there had plans that differed substantially from those of the United Nations and its agencies. In his view, repatriation of the border population should take place only after a political settlement had been reached and after that settlement had led to the termination of hostilities in Cambodia.

D. Bayandor, the UNHCR representative, said a mixed pattern of return could be expected following the conclusion of a peace settlement. He urged co-operation to ensure that a return to malaria-prone and mine-infested areas could be averted.

The WFP representative, John Powell, said the overall food shortage for this year would be three times that for 1990, due to late and erratic rain and continued hostilities. Solutions had to be found if the level of food aid to be distributed in 1991 were to reach even minimal levels.

Ingar Bruggemann, of WHO, said recent political developments had enabled his organization to expand its participation in humanitarian efforts in Cambodia and to consider re-establishing a presence within the country.

The next donors' meeting will be held in April, in Bangkok, and the third in September, in New York.

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